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#### ABSTRACT

An individualized approach to second language reading instruction in a large class is described. First, characteristics of the large class as a teaching and learning environment are examined, and the instructional advantages of individualizing assignments are noted. Two forms of reading materials used with first-year college students are then discussed. The first is a booklet of 10 similar, brief readings. Each student is assigned one of the ten texts to read in depth and given a list of questions to consider and answer, based on the text. In a class of 60, only 6 students are working on the same text, and must work alone and quietly, allowing some time for the teacher to return previous assignments and answer individual questions. The readings are varied in both type and topic, and the questions address comprehension of content, opinion, format, and vocabulary. The second kind of reading material used is a booklet made by small groups of students to build on new vocabulary learning. Each group works cooperatively to create a vocabulary list, and the groups' lists are compiled into one reference. Procedures for this project are detailed, and some samples of student work are appended. Contains three references. (MSE)

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# Individualizing Reading Assignments in Large Class Language Study

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Torkil Christensen Hokusei Women's Junior College

#### Scope

This paper is the third in a series of descriptions of what I have been doing in reading lessons with large classes. The previous papers have described an approach to help students to become comfortable with newspapers in English in a one year course (Christensen, 1991), and the second paper provided details for managing extensive reading with the many students (Christensen, 1992).

The aim of this paper is to discuss the large class environment to better establish the advantages of individualizing assignments and to describe some individualized assignments of this kind, additional to those detailed in the two previous papers. The discussion in this paper is aimed at language learning throughout, except where otherwise noted. The suggestions and ideas were developed while teaching reading and writing to first year students at the college in the past year.

After the discussion of the large class environment a scheme of booklets with sets of readings is detailed, with examples of the assignments students were asked to complete. The third section of the paper details how to produce student made booklets for vocabulary study, with examples of the assignments accompanying these and also examples of the pages that went into these booklets.

#### The Large Class Environment

The design of exercises and activities for large classes depend on an understanding of the conditions of this particular environment, not only from the viewpoint of the instructor but also from that of the students and even outside observers.

To an outside observer the large number of students with one instructor could seem to mandate a strongly teacher centered rigidly structured approach to the teaching. This is indeed what is often employed in large classes, and such an approach to the teaching provides a convenient avenue to convey information and specific skills that all students need to acquire.

However, a teacher centered approach is not always advantageous. Relying on oneway communication from teacher to students gives rise to a variety of problems, as

invariably shown in surveys of student impressions of the activities in large classes, and reported by Allright(1989).

In a teacher centered large class environment, student activity is not limited to reacting to the teaching. In large classes students may feel that nothing much goes on a lot of the time. That happens when teacher directed study appears irrelevant to individual students or when the teacher is busy attending to some students at the expense of the rest. When students do not actively take part in the class study, the class time may be spent in individual reflection on the material taught or on extraneous matters, socializing with other students, or other activities that are not necessarily related to the learning.

Further, while the teacher is engaged in explaining material to students there are invariably some who do not pay attention, or who do not comprehend completely. Then, even when comprehension is not complete, there are usually only inadequate opportunities to request further elucidation, and this makes it difficult for students to catch up. As a result, when testing learning of specifically taught matters at the end of lessons, very few students display a full mastery of the material taught and the rest show widely varying degrees of understanding. It is further rarely possible to know whether the knowledge displayed in such tests is due to prior learning or a result of the lesson.

A further constraint on tests in large classes is that they must be arranged so that the large number of students can be graded with a minimum of effort, and this often obviates individual attention. There is not time to provide complete feedback, and feedback is often of a general nature that does not address the problems of all students.

From the student's vantage point, much goes on in a large classroom, and many aspects other than the teaching distract and hold student attention. The noise and physical discomfort in an often crowded room demand focused concentration to follow the lesson. The teaching may not be at the level that the student is interested in or comfortable with, and in this respect there is little that a teacher centered approach can accomplish other than hoping that students are and remain interested.

An optimum learning environment for a student would be one where the material is at the level of the student and where the student has some influence on the material that is being studied, or at least on the form of the study.

Individualizing assignments seems an attractive option in all skill areas, and it is usually possible to introduce a large element of student control in any area of language learning. The types of individualized assignments dealt with in this report were developed for reading classes, but it would be possible to extend them to study which concentrates on other skills.

The instructor, adopting a teacher centered approach in a large class does not have



the luxury of addressing the needs of specific students, and may decide to aim teaching at the average, the better, or the poorer students. It will however often be impossible to know how well an approach matches the needs of a particular class or approach before quite some time has passed, and this lack of feedback to the teacher may become a source of much frustration and unnecessary worry for both instructor and students.

Individualizing assignments offer great advantages from the instructor's point of view. With individualized assignments, students work at different assignments, and this releases the instructor to attend to those students who need attention, students work on their own without the option of relying on copying and the instructor becomes able to accept responses based on the perceived abilities of individual students.

The above discussion shows that large classes may turn into less than optimum learning environments and that both student learning and teacher wellbeing may suffer in the process.

Individualizing assignments offers an avenue to overcome many of the drawbacks. Optimally they require each student to work at a level and degree of complexity that matches the student. It becomes impossible to simply copy assignments from fellow students, and so requires each student to work with the material, at the same time as fellow students can act as informers on how to respond to an assignment. With individual assignments, the discussion among students in class will be about the content of the assignments and ways to respond, and students will be exposed to more of the various assignments than their own. There may be a need for introducing new concepts and material to the whole class, but much of the time is available to deal with students on a one to one basis.

There are also potential drawbacks when attempting to provide individualized assignments. Such assignments may require copying facilities and perhaps the teacher needs help with collating and other aspects of preparations for the classes. Finding suitable materials in the amounts necessary to have all students working on different assignments is also a problem, as are problems with copyright. The following will assume that such physical, logistic constraints are resolved and do not present problems.

The previous two papers (Christensen, 1991 and 1992) discussed some individualized assignments: the use of SRA reading laboratories, exercises requiring reactions to single sentences, assignments where all students use different texts (newspapers) as the basis for their reading, and gave general suggestions to allow a high degree of individualization. The following will describe two approaches that I developed last year.

This paper may be considered a progress report in an ongoing attempt to provide a less teacher centered environment where students in large classes have more responsibility for their study.



### Booklets

The booklets consist of a number of sets of ten similar readings. They were introduced to overcome the paucity of reading material in the textbook and the difficulty of keeping track of separate prints. The readings in one set are of similar length and content, for example about different areas of the world, or like the examples at the end of this section.

All ten readings are assigned at once, and each student reads the story on the page where the last digit in the page number matches the last digit in the student number. As a result each student reads one of the ten pages in detail and the remaining pages can be used for surveying or other purposes. In a class of sixty students, only half a dozen students will then be reading the same page (text), and it is rare that neighbors are working on the same reading. The assignment that students have to complete for the ten pages is provided on a separate print to allow opportunity to read and comprehend and complete it at their own pace. The assignments consist of "generic" questions, questions that apply to all the ten pages in the set. Examples are provided at the end of this section.

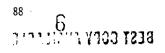
In a lesson with such a booklet I (the teacher) introduce the new reading strategy or other point that I wish to draw attention to, and then the students are left to work through the assignment.

During class, the teacher's job is to assist students who have problems with the assignments, or who have other business to transact with the teacher. I made assignments so that they could be completed in one lesson, or assigned parts of an assignment for one lesson by writing the questions in the assignment which should be completed in this lesson on the blackboard (the parts of a longer assignment that I would expect completed in this lesson).

In class, students read the assigned text and do the exercises. Quite some discussion goes on between the students, and much of that is related to the meaning and implications of the different readings. As nearly all students have to work on their own the classroom is generally quiet, providing a good setting for handing back assignments from previous lessons and attending to student queries.

There are of course a number of problems: usually some of the questions do not apply very well to all the ten readings, students misunderstand parts of the assignment, or are unable to perform the tasks despite the instructions.

When questions do not fit the reading a student is working with, I ask this student to write "doesn't apply" or to provide some explanation why the question doesn't fit. The assignment may also ask for a set number of instances of words, patterns, or similar, and a reading may not contain enough such instances. In that case the stu-





dents are asked to write that there are not enough such instances. At first students are puzzled by being allowed to apparently avoid finding a real answer, but it is soon accepted as a sufficient response.

Undoubtedly these two ways to escape answering are overused, however the incidence has seemed low and where a response of this kind is in any way reasonable I accept it. After the initial puzzlement at being allowed such "inadequate" responses, the students seem to appreciate the arrangement.

Where my ideas and a student's are at substantial variance in a particular response, I may ask the student to explain the thinking behind the response and then I explain the ai.n I had with the question, and do not generally ask the student to redo the response. Subjectively, this approach seems to build a degree of trust, and students rarely seem to deliberately shirk assignments. However when readings are difficult or uninteresting it could be a problem.

#### Examples of readings for booklets:

- I Directory of Environmental Groups
- I Imaginary Places
- II Origins of Everyday Things
- IV Ecological Issues and Opinions
- V Things to Keep in Mind
- VI Book Reviews
- VI Stories:

Less is more: A call for shorter work hours
What you don't know about Indians
Too much stuff! Our accumulating crisis
Who says the family farm is dead?
Frances Moore Lappe's diet for a better world

#### Brief explanations of each of these groups:

- I A page here consisted of details of half a dozen environmental groups, their purpose, address, membership, funding, activities, etc. The students were asked to compare the diverse groups on several criteria (cost, purpose, etc.), and to offer an opinion about each group.
- Il These pages consisted of two discriptions (one long and one short) of imaginary places in literature. Students were asked to report details of these places and how they related to the real world. As the places were imaginary they would be unknown to the students and so students would be unable to rely on what they already knew.
- M A page here consisted of the history of a thing in everyday use or the history of a ceremony or similar, well known to the students. It was expected and confirmed, that



students were not aware of the origins of these matters and that they found the newly won information interesting.

- IV A page here was an essay about an ecological problem written by an expert in the field. Students were generally aware of the problem but not of details of the problem, and they responded with interest to these texts.
- V Each of the pages here had one or two suggestions for how to approach life in our modern world, like: distinguish fact from opinion; become more knowledgable of history; or similar.
- VI It was difficult to find book reviews of the right length, and the two that each student had to read generally spread over two pages. The reviews were rather difficult and students were not excited by these readings.
- Where stories were assigned in twos and threes and provided a change of pace from the ten page reading sets. As the titles indicate, the stories dealt with matters of an everyday nature and seemed to be read with attention.

#### Examples of assignments:

The following is the first assignment after the booklets have been distributed, the aim is to have the students look around and orient themselves in the booklet without getting too involved in the details of the texts:

First I would like us to orient ourselves in the readings. Please look around in your booklet (today you decide where to look), pick about ten pages, and tell me:

- 1) What is your first impression of each page?
- 2) What does it seem like each of these pages is about?
- 3) What is a remarkable thing on the page (each page)?
- -do this for each of the ten pages please.

Then read the right hand stories on pp.55 and 56, and tell me (for each of the two stories):

- 4) Does it make sense?
- 5) Do you egree?
- 6) How can you do as it is suggested?

The instructions for the first three items above may seem unnecessarily repetitive, but the students seem to benefit from very detailed and redundant instructions. The lack of a need to read all the ten pages may be the main challenge for students here. I am of course also available to provide further explanations.

Items four and five are in group V above and are short and clear readings that may be seen to relate to the lives of the studens.



The students get about one hour of class time to do this assignment. It elicited much discussion and looking over shoulders and showing friends the pages they had discovered.

The following assignment is for the group V stories above:

- 1. Look at all the "Things to Keep in Mind," and tell me which seem
  - a) Reasonable
  - b) Unreasonable
  - c) Incomprehensible
  - d) Easy to Follow
  - e) Difficult to Follow
  - -pick two for each category and give a reason why you choze it.
- 2. What are half a dozen difficult words in your "Thing to Keep in Mind" + in the next one?

What do they do in their sentences?

Are they in the Word Booklet?

Do they seem useful to know?

(for each word)

- 3. What is your "Thing to Keep in Mind," summarize it in 30 words; then give an example of it from your daily life, does it make sense in Japan? Comment some more.
- 4. Pick another page, and do the same as in 3).

#### NEXT:

For p.54, and the left side of pp. 55 & 56, look at and read the three stories:

- 5. did anybody else ever tell you this (who, why, when, and how did they tell you-for each)?
- 6. give an example where you did what the stories ask you to(for each story).
- 7. find three words in these three "Things to Keep in Mind" that have explanations in the Word Booklet.

Students get a full 90 minute lesson to complete this, it first requires them to look lightly at all the ten pages and then to read their own page in some more detail. Rather than doing just one page they have to read through two (item 4), and the second seemed to be easier to do than the first.

Were the students to read and do everything in this assignment in great detail, it would probably be difficult to complete the assignment during the lesson, and many do not complete it. But they are instructed to work quickly and try to grasp the intent behind the readings rather than every detail in it.

Questions four and seven mention a Word Booklet which is explained below. Here

the students are asked to use this Word Booklet which they themselves have produced.

When sensitizing students to reading strategies, an assignment may look like the following. Here the focus is on cause and effect statements which have been introduced by the instructor. The "your page" referred to in 1 and 2 is an interview with a person that the students have read previously:

1) Find 5 cause-effect statements on your page

a

Where and what are they (and put c and e over/under the words)?

2) Find 5 cause-effect statements on another page

Where and what are they (and pure and  $\epsilon$  over/under the words)?

- 3) What are some difficult words on your Imaginary Place page (I above), with an explanation for the meaning (half a dozen for each place).
- 4) What are some useful verb phrases in the stories about imaginary places (tell me three for each place)?
- 5) Tell me what you think about the imaginary places, each of them. How you would like to go there, why, and what would happen if you went.

A full 90 minute class was set aside for this assignment, the cause-effect statements were a new thing, but the readings where the students were searching for them were known. It is the first time to deal with the Imaginary Places page and there is time to look around in the texts and to read them.

Next is the following assignment where the interviews and the Imaginary Places are used again:

1) About your page, please tell me, in half a dozen words:

Who?

Where?

When?

What?

Why?

- 2) and for one of the other pages, tell me which page and the answers to the questions above.
- 3) About the longest story on your "Imaginary Places" page:
  - 1. What kind of people live there?
  - 2. What do they do?
  - 3. What happens there?





- 4. What has happened there(history)?
- 5. What is a happy thing there?
- 6. What is a problem there?
- 4) How is the place you explained about in 3)
  - 1. Landmarks
  - 2. Climate
  - 3. Strange features
  - 4. Nature

In this assignment 1) is for the interview mentioned in the previous assignment, and the attention to who/where/when/what/why is a new element. The questions about the Imaginary Places ask the students to report details of these stories.

#### Student-Made Booklets

These booklets were produced by and used to help students in their vocabulary study and were also employed to help students benefit from their large numbers in the classes, by showing them that the large group can cooperate to learn a great deal about one topic, with limited individual effort.

For the vocabulary study, students were put in groups of two or three and asked to produce a page (size specified, usually A4) with words they had newly learned. They were asked to provide a set number each, and on the page to detail what the words were, what they meant, where they had found them, and to add some more. The "some more" can be a story that incorporated all the words presented, or a drawing to enliven the page or represent some or all of the words.

The first time we tried this. I arranged the groups and distributed the assignment about 20 minutes before the end of the lesson, and so provided time for the students to get acquainted with the other people in their group, and discuss how to divide up the work. It is possible to have students decide the groups themselves, I did not do that but used student numbers to determine the groups. This seemed to work well, except perhaps in a few cases where one or more of the group members were consistently absent. Here I made allowances for such special conditions, lightening the load on the remaining students.

There was a deadline for submission of the completed pages and it was generally kept. The pages were assembled and copied in booklet form with a front page and index of the words appearing on the different pages. The index was produced by word-processor by me.

Production of such booklets requires some attention to detail, but it is well within

the skills of the average language teacher, the arrangement of the pages is the most complex. The positioning of the cover page and index can be used to make the number of pages even, and copying is not really complex with a double sided copier. The completed pages were then given to the students who assembled the booklet individually. Here it is important to have clear pagenumbers on the pages.

With about 20 groups and fifteen words a page the total number of words reaches close to 300, even with overlaps. This may be the maximum that can be accommodated in one booklet. Fewer words would often be adequate, but the complexily of the booklet should be determined by the use that is intended for it, and some experimentation may be necessary in particular situations.

When the booklet was presented to the students, one lesson was spent looking around in the booklet and making use of the words that are presented there, the appendix has an example of such an assignment. Later in the year I repeatedly required the students to use this Word Booklet to find words that they had trouble with in other readings.

The students enjoyed making the booklets, and the repeated use seemed to be welcomed. The limited scope of a booklet (as compared to a dictionary) seems attractive and apparently encouraged its use.

l also had one class make a booklet with descriptions of the fifty states of the United States. It was quite successful but may take up more time than is generally available in a reading course of the kind considered here.

Using such a content based booklet seems to offer possibilities for content based courses. In this case the information provided about the various states was in no way exhaustive, but the fact that all states appeared, and are described in an easily accessible manner seems to provide a good introduction to the states.

#### The assignments to make and work with the Word Booklets:

The following is the assignment detailing how to make the booklets.

New words we learned/experenced/ran into since the holidays:

With your partner(s), fill in an A4 page with new words you have learned from the booklet and other sources since the holidays.

Each of you should provide half a dozen words, note where you found them, what they mean, and how they are useful to know. Also tell us some words that are related to the new ones (maybe some you already know or which are also new).

Write a story with all the words. It will have to be a slightly mad story to get all the words in, I guess, so don't worry about reality.

The words you introduce are for you and everybody in the class to use so make your



explanations helpful, and readable.

The following assignment is for the students to acquaint themselves with the word-Booklet.

This is all about the Word Booklet:

- I) Look at the index, find three interesting words and look them up. Then tell me: a) are the explanations understandable;
  - b) do they appear in their stories;
  - c) can you find them in the booklet;
  - d) do you know these words now?

(for each word please)

II) Please look around in the stories on each page, which

seems funniest?

strangest?

has all the words on the page?

has the fewest of the words?

- II) Please look at the three pages before or after "your" page and for those three pages tell me: a) which the pages are,
  - b) which two words have the best explanations,
  - c) which two the poorest explanations,
  - d) which two are the most useful to know,
  - e) which two the most difficult to learn, and
  - f) which two the most unnnecessary.

Give reasons for selecting each word.

IV) How would you have made your page different now that you see the whole Word Booklet?

#### Finally

The above described two ideas for individualizing assignments in large classes. The two formats have been used successfully, but can probably be further refined, when such further refinements have been worked out it is hoped to provide of these in a future edition of the Bulletin.

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147. mikako niragawa (P.5 - booklet) ... very great in strength irtense (P.5) carns you a lot of money; of formal word affection for someone. 2 lucrative \* 3 devotion \* Amaruscript (P.17) ... a hondwritten or typed document. (P.17) a scientist in the middle ages who (P.17) hired to discover how to change (P.17) ordinary metals into gold. \*"balchenist \*"berudite ··· thow great academic knowledge. The effects of the drug are interise and brief. It had been ar exciting and lucrative business. Their devotion to their children is plain to see I suggest that you offer your manuscript to a publisher at a later date. We is an alchemist who was a scientist in the middle ages who tired to discover how to charge ordinary the erudite scholar Herbert Thurston. \*"1 intensely, intensity, very deep \*"2 lucre, profitable. \* 3 devote, devotional, love, dedication. \*4 print, write \* 5 alchemistic, alchemize, alchemy, transmuter learned, scholarly, eruditely \* STORY \* There was a fiction wither in the city.

\* STORY \* She was an intense person and an excuring person but she had never One day she fell in love with on alchemist . She wrote manuscripts of love story under herself devotion, and then at last she earned a lot of money thanks to the love story. It had been an humative business if

- ·No.191 Satomi Fukushi
- No. 209 Minako Miyata
- No. 226 Masumi Tsumura

Words	Place	Meaning	How ?
<ul> <li>incendiaty</li> <li>tigorous</li> <li>isolation</li> <li>sarcophagi</li> <li>legendary</li> <li>chamber</li> </ul>	in booklet in booklet in booklet in booklet in booklet	Setting fire to something Used to describe things that are done or carried out in	When the man who make a fire.  When we show person's character.  The character we are lonely, we use this word.  The character we are lonely, we use this for person's we grave.  The example an idol etc
<ul><li>gravity</li><li>morbid</li><li>Tendency</li></ul>	in booklet in booklet in booklet	to fall to the ground.  • great an interest inumpleasant things especially in death.	Slanted. When we think about result of traffic
<ul><li>infantile</li><li>Skeptical</li><li>buccaneer</li></ul>	in booklet in booklet in booklet	way.  you have doubts about it.  one who attacked and Stole from	accidents, prices and soon, when adults doesn't like things and goods proper for age. When there is a purson who can't believe things, this word shows disposition of this person.  When we rend book of send duenture, we can find a lot of this word in the book.

There was a skeptical legendary. He sent a mordid incendiary and a rigorous buccaneer that have a infantile tendency to his chamber. He nanted to know which they were clever. So he asked them what it is gravity. He gave them two sorcophagiand two isolation toom.

## SOLD STATE - ALASKA

Most people think Alaska is a cold area, but its latitude is as high as the one of Britain or Belgium. Actually, it is relatively warm at the Pacific Coast. Alaska was discovered by a Russian explorer, Vitus Bering, and became a territory of Russia. However, Russia declined and feared that Britain would take Alaska away. Solution was only 7.2 million dollor. In 1890's, gold rush happened, and the population of Alaska increased.

OHIO; (Capital Columbus Area 41.222 sq. mi.

motto: With Lood, All things Are Possibles

Ohio is the nation's third-greatest industrial
state and has combined important mineral resources
with a central location to become the most industrialized state in the interior of America. Four land
regions make up Ohio. The highland area of the Appalachian Plateau constitutes nearly the entire eastern
half of the state. Ohio's largest forests, its richest
mineral deposits and
most impressive scenery.

92E022 Megumi Kiminaka

nurture: If you nurture a young child or young plant, you care for it while it is growing & developing.

Solution: A solution is a way of dealing with a difficult situation so that the difficulty is removed.

regional: Regional organizations and activities relate to a particular area of a country

ingeniously: The hangers were ingeniously fixed to the wardrobe by pleces of wire.

commission: If you commission something or someone to do something, you formally arrange for somone to do a piece of work for you.

embrace: When you embrace some one, you put your arms around them in order to show your affection for them.

perpetuate: 15 someone or something perpetuates a situation or belief, they cause it to continue; a formal word.

affirm: 19 you affirm a fact, you state that it's definitely to

inspire: 15 someone or something inspires you to do something; they make you want to do it by giving you new ideas.

diverse: People or things that are diverse are very different from each other.

array: An array of different things is a large number of them innovate: To innovate means to introduce changes a new ideas

5 7 0

A long time ago, ababy was born.
The baby was named Michael. Michael was nurtured ingeniously by his parents. After 15 years, he went to school. He was very bright boy. He was popular with students. He studied diverse subject. He often spent after school in the library. There was an array of book. By the way, his town had regional custom, The custom was very strickly a old. People in the town thought that someone abolish this evil costom, when Michael was 20, her

got a commision suddenly. He insisted its said, " (want to live in this town forever. I love my town." Every students were sure that he had good idea of solution to make new custom. They inspired him to become their chief. They affirmed that they must change the custom. Their efforts made the dream came true. They innovated on old customs. They embraced each other a their friendship was perpetuate. written by

Chi haru Groto 5 Shoko Neda 5



92E 92E.85 Sayaka Matsutomo 92 E058 Norlko Aoki New Words o assassination (P38) ...... When someone important is assassinated, they are murdered. E4) an assassination attempt. o inability (P39) ..... If you refer to someone's inability to do something, you are referring to the fact that they are unable to do it. Ea) She despises her hasband for his inability to work . (impossibility) · ecosystems (p40) ........ A ecosystem is all the plants and animals that live in a particular area together with the complex relationship that exists between all of them and their anvironment; a technical word. o gain (P44) Eq) the intricate prairie ecosystem (?)...... If you gain a quality, you gradually get more of it. (get) EG) The speaker began to gain confidence · adage (P46) general truth about some aspect of life: an old fashioned word. Eq.) She reminded me of the old adage. (maxim) · frequently (p48) You say that something in frequent when it often happens 60) This question is frequently asked Co

One day a assassination happend. The person who was killed was one girl. The girl's name is Emily. She was interested in the ecosystems and she always wanted to protect it. She liked flowers and animals. But, she was inability to protect it... Suddenly, she hit upon one good idea. "MONEY IS BEST!!" So, she frequently robbed a bankto gain a lot of money. At last, she was assassinated.

The adage says "Ishibashi o tataite watalu." 3

She didn't have the spirit. —END—